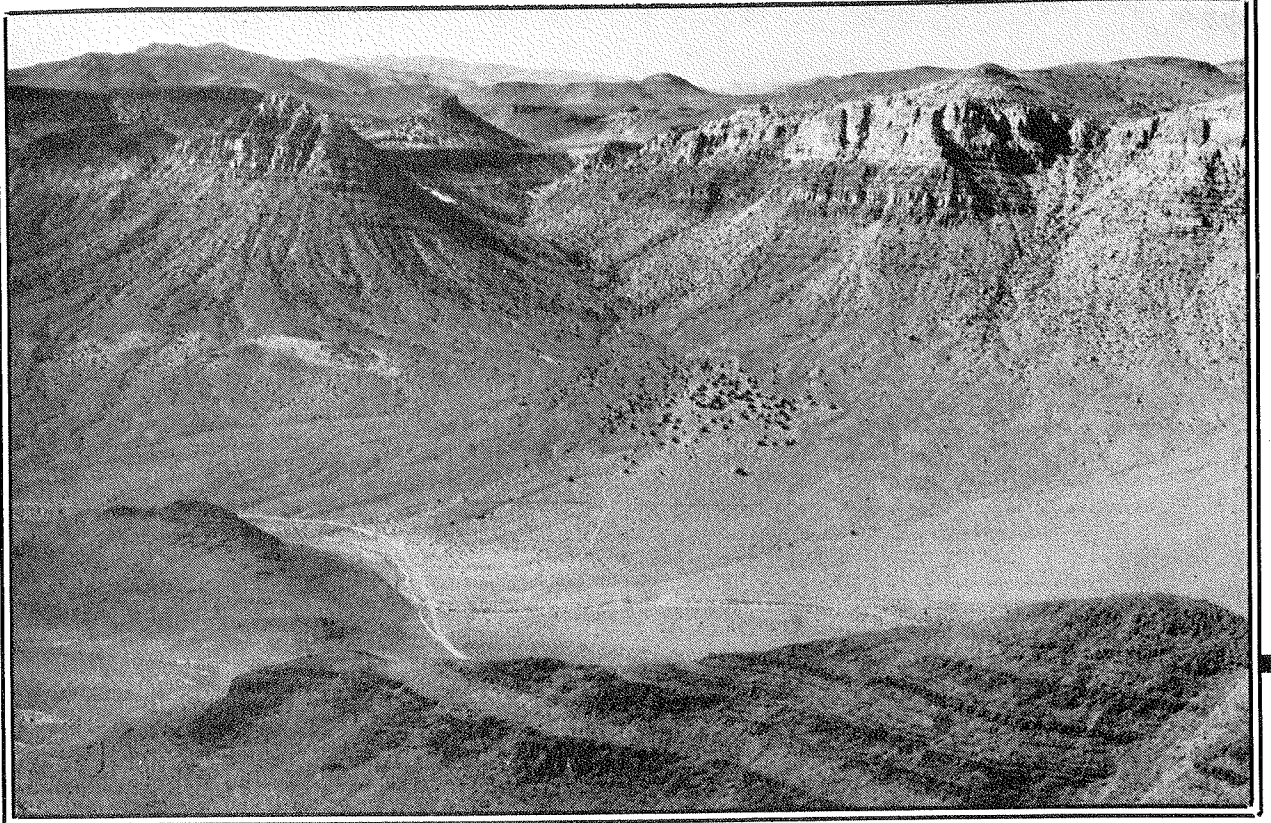


King Top WSA

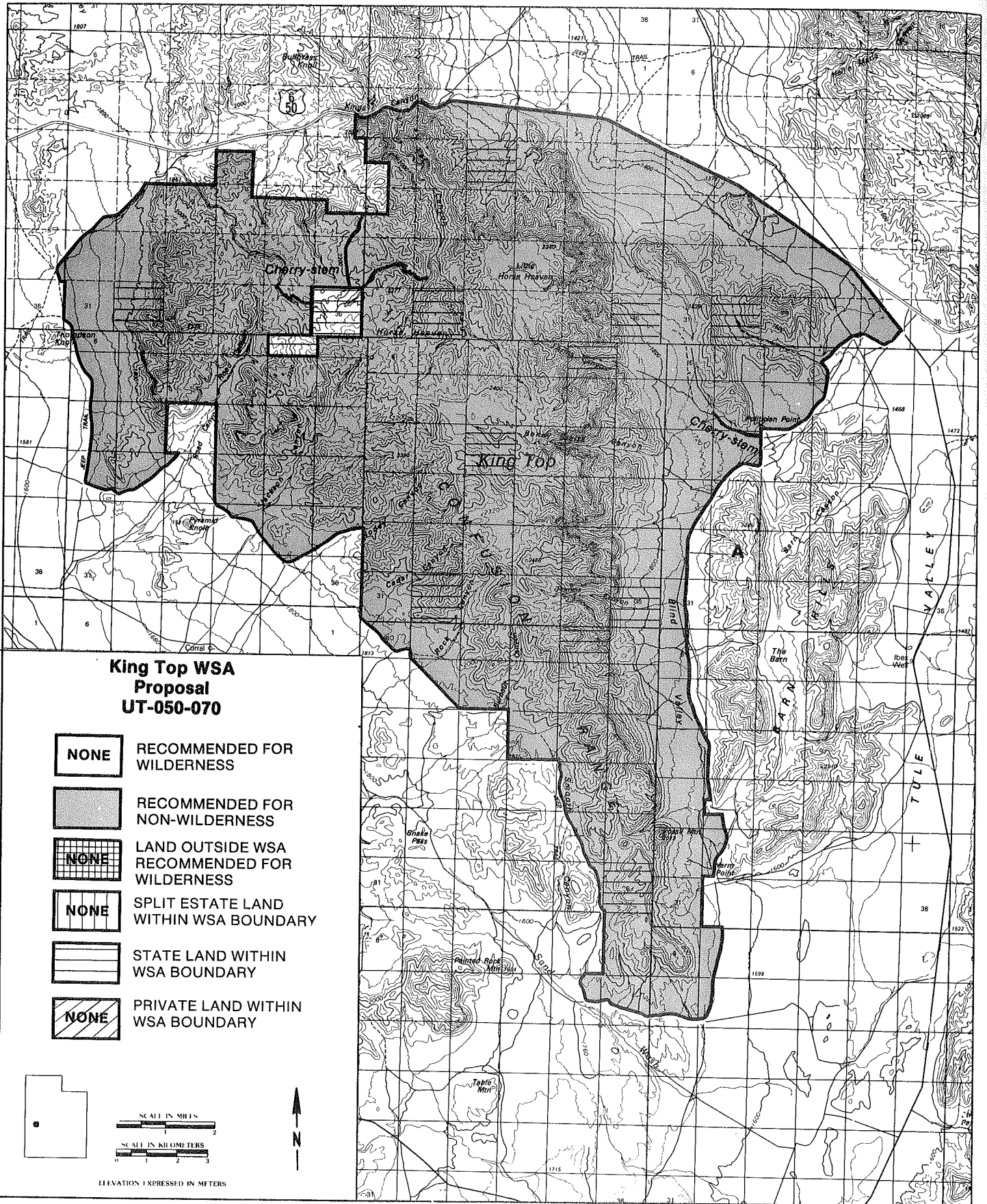


KING TOP WSA

R. 16 W.

R. 15 W.

R. 14 W.



KING TOP WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

1. THE STUDY AREA: 84,770 acres

The King Top Wilderness Study Area (WSA) (UT-050-070) is in the Confusion Range, in southwestern Millard County, about 50 miles southwest of Delta, Utah (population 1,930). The WSA is umbrella-shaped, and is about 19 miles from north to south and 17 miles at the widest, from east to west (see Map). It includes 84,770 acres of public land administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and 6,661 acres of State land (see Table 1). The WSA is the largest WSA in western Utah. Improved and unimproved roads delimit the WSA on all sides. The Notch Peak WSA (UT-050-078) is directly to the northeast, separated from the King Top WSA by U.S. Highways 50 and 6. The King Top WSA is surrounded mostly by public lands.

Like most other mountain ranges in the Great Basin, the Confusion Range rises abruptly above the surrounding desert valleys. The Range differs from other Great Basin ranges, however, in that the summit portion is almost a plateau, a hilly upland with the steepest slopes on the eastern side. Elevations range from 5,000 feet at the edges of the WSA to more than 8,000 feet. Desert shrub predominates at lower elevations and pinyon-juniper woodland is dominant on the King Top plateau.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and was included in the Utah BLM Statewide Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), finalized in November 1990.

TABLE 1
LAND STATUS AND ACREAGE SUMMARY IN THE STUDY AREA

	ACRES
BLM (surface and subsurface)	84,770
Split-Estate (BLM surface only)	0
In-holdings (State, Private)	6,661
Total	91,431
WITHIN THE RECOMMENDED WILDERNESS BOUNDARY	
BLM (within the WSA)	0
BLM (outside the WSA)	0
Split-Estate (within the WSA)	0
Split-Estate (outside the WSA)	0
Total BLM land recommended for wilderness	0
In-holdings (State, private)	0
WITHIN THE AREA NOT RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS	
BLM	84,770
Split-Estate	0
Total BLM land not recommended for wilderness	84,770
In-holdings (State, Private)	6,661

Source: BLM File Data

KING TOP WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

Three alternatives were analyzed in the EIS: a no wilderness (no action) alternative which is the recommendation in this report, a partial wilderness alternative where 53,044 acres would be designated as wilderness and 31,726 acres would be released for uses other than wilderness, and an all wilderness alternative.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE:

0 acres

(recommended for wilderness)

84,770 acres

(recommended for nonwilderness)

The recommendation for this WSA is to release all of the area for uses other than wilderness. Designation of the entire area as wilderness is considered to be the environmentally preferable alternative as it would result in the least change from the natural environment over the long term. The alternative selected, however, would be implemented in a manner which would utilize all practical means to avoid or minimize adverse environmental impacts.

Inclusion of the WSA in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) could add a potential ecosystem not presently represented (see "Expanding the Diversity of Natural Systems . . ."). Other wilderness values in the WSA are not exceptional. The WSA has moderate potential for discovery of oil and gas resources and includes 11 sections of State land to which access would have to be allowed. All of these sections are leased for livestock grazing and at least four are leased for minerals. About 44 percent of the WSA is now under post-FLPMA mining claim and proprietary company data (reviewed by BLM and the U.S. Geological Survey [USGS] geologists in 1991) indicate that there is a high potential for the existence of valid claims on BLM lands and a need for additional access to State lands at least in the northwestern part of the WSA. Reasonable access to in-held lands cannot be denied.

Although all of the WSA is essentially natural, 30 miles of ways penetrate the area. Opportunities for solitude meet Wilderness Act standards on 50,000 acres (59 percent of the area) but, except for fossil collecting at one locality in the

WSA, opportunities for primitive recreation are less than outstanding throughout the WSA. None of the scenery is exceptional. No distinctive or unique features are present. All of the special features in the WSA, including bald and golden eagles, candidate or sensitive species, wild horses, and fossils can be managed and protected without wilderness designation.

BLM believes that nonwilderness values outweigh the relatively few wilderness values of any significant quality which could merit recommending wilderness designation.

About 1,920 acres surrounding Fossil Mountain would continue to be protected under the existing designation of Historic Site/Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC).

3. CRITERIA USED IN DEVELOPING THE WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATION

Wilderness Characteristics

A. Naturalness

Naturalness is defined as an attribute in which the evidence of man is substantially unnoticeable to the average visitor and where minor imprints of man exhibit no cumulative impact that is substantially noticeable. Essentially all of the WSA meets the naturalness criteria of the Wilderness Act. The area is comprised of a combination of unaltered sheer tan and gray cliffs; light tan low rolling foothills with scattered juniper trees; and a large plateau with dark patches of pinyon and juniper trees. Approximately 30 miles of ways in the WSA are substantially unnoticeable. In 1981, uranium exploration activities included 26 drill sites and 5 miles of road in the southeast corner of the WSA. Together with an 8 mile long road constructed to a State section near the center of the WSA, about 20 acres were disturbed. All disturbance is being rehabilitated. A road to a microwave site in the northern part of the WSA has been cherry-stemmed and is excluded from the WSA.

KING TOP WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

B. Solitude

About 50,000 acres (59 percent of the WSA) in the more rugged and more densely vegetated central part of the study area meet the Wilderness Act standards for solitude. The remainder of the WSA is only sparsely covered by low-growing plants, is relatively flat, and does not meet the standards for outstanding solitude. The King Top WSA is in the South range of the U.S. Air Force (USAF) Utah Test and Training Range (UTTR), one of the country's busiest military air spaces. From 100 to 150 daily flights, 6 days a week, are made in the UTTR. Some flights are as low as 100 feet above ground level. The WSA is in the southern part of the UTTR, which is used somewhat less than the northern portion, but aircraft occasionally fly directly over the WSA. Although these overflights are subsonic, they can be an annoyance that detracts from but does not eliminate overall opportunities for solitude.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation

Wilderness Act standards for opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation are substantially not met in the King Top WSA, with the exception of fossil collecting at Fossil Mountain, near the southeastern edge of the WSA, where 1,920 acres have been identified as an ACEC for lower Ordovician fossils.

D. Special Features

Bald eagles and peregrine falcons, both listed as endangered species, and golden eagles, a BLM sensitive species, inhabit the WSA. Candidate threatened or endangered species that may inhabit the WSA include the ferruginous hawk, Swainson's hawk, long-billed curlew, western snowy plover, and white-faced ibis. These birds frequent areas throughout the Great Basin and the western United States.

One plant species eligible for listing as threatened or endangered and one Category 2 candidate plant species which may become listed, Eriogonum amophilum and Cryptantha compacta, respectively, are also found in the WSA.

Fossil Mountain is one of the more important localities in the world for

early Ordovician fossils, and is frequently visited by paleontologists and amateur collectors.

A herd of 45 wild horses roams the WSA. While wild horses are not unique in the western United States, however, they are of considerable interest to the average visitor. Management plans are to maintain the herd at 30 head.

Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System

A. Expanding the Diversity of Natural Systems and Features as Represented by Ecosystems

Wilderness designation of this WSA would add a potential natural vegetation (PNV) ecosystem (spruce-fir-Douglas fir forest) not presently represented in the NWPS, and represented in other BLM WSAs only in the North Stansbury Mountains.

PNV is the vegetative type that would eventually become climax vegetation if not altered by human interference, and is not necessarily the vegetation currently in an area. The WSA is in the Intermountain Sagebrush Province/Ecoregion. The PNV types in the WSA are juniper-pinyon woodland (33,908 acres) and spruce-fir-Douglas fir forest (50,862 acres). Juniper-pinyon woodland is not well represented in the NWPS but is widely represented in other WSAs.

This information is summarized in Table 2 from data compiled in December 1989.

B. Assessing the Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive Recreation within a Days Driving Time (5 Hours) of Major Population Centers

The WSA is within a 5-hour drive of the Salt Lake City-Ogden, Utah; Provo-Orem, Utah; and Las Vegas, Nevada standard metropolitan statistical areas. Table 3 summarizes the number and acreage of designated areas and other BLM study areas within a 5-hour drive of these population centers.

C. Balancing the Geographic Distribution of Wilderness Areas

A King Top wilderness would not contribute significantly to balancing the

KING TOP WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

TABLE 2
ECOSYSTEM REPRESENTATION

BAILEY-KUCHLER CLASSIFICATION (PNV)	NWPS AREAS		OTHER BLM STUDIES	
	AREAS	ACRES	AREAS	ACRES
NATIONWIDE (INTERMOUNTAIN SAGEBRUSH PROVINCE)				
Juniper-Pinyon Woodland	6	93,656	75	2,119,999
Spruce-Fir-Douglas Fir Forest	0	0	1	700
UTAH (INTERMOUNTAIN SAGEBRUSH PROVINCE)				
Juniper-Pinyon Woodland	2	14,955	12	225,525
Spruce-Fir-Douglas Fir Forest	0	0	1	700

Source: BLM File Data.

TABLE 3
WILDERNESS OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESIDENTS OF MAJOR POPULATION CENTERS

POPULATION CENTERS	NWPS AREAS		OTHER BLM STUDIES	
	AREAS	ACRES	AREAS	ACRES
Salt Lake City-Ogden, Utah	10	1,079,807	78	2,239,275
Provo-Orem, Utah	11	708,638	90	2,766,468
Las Vegas, Nevada	38	3,132,130	54	2,134,358

Source: BLM File Data.

geographic distribution of areas within the NWPS in the central-western United States. Inclusion of the WSA in the NWPS could, however, contribute to balancing the NWPS in the Great Basin.

As of January 1987, the NWPS included 65 areas comprising 2,898,792 acres in Utah and (Nevada and Arizona) the adjacent states nearest the WSA. In a clockwise direction, within 100 miles of the WSA, beginning to the northeast, are the 25,500-acre Deseret Peak Wilderness, the 28,000-acre Mt. Nebo Wilderness, and to the south, the 7,000-acre Ashdown Gorge Wilderness, and the 50,000-acre Pine Valley Mountain Wilderness. All areas are in the National Forests.

Only six wilderness areas, comprising 272,994 acres, are within the Great

Basin. Considering as well that the WSA includes a PNV ecosystem not represented in the NWPS (see "Expanding the Diversity of Natural Systems . . ."), the King Top WSA could provide a contribution to the NWPS in the Great Basin.

Manageability (The area must be capable of being effectively managed to preserve its wilderness character.)

The WSA may not be manageable as wilderness. The Warm Springs Resource Management Plan includes management prescriptions for the WSA that have as their objective feasible use and protection of resources in the WSA. This includes the 1,920-acre Fossil Mountain Historic Site ACEC, which is closed to surface occupancy for oil and gas leases to protect the fossil beds from damage.

KING TOP WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

There is one post-FLPMA oil and gas lease (800 acres) in the WSA. It is subject to the nonimpairment stipulation and can be managed to protect wilderness values. There are 43 mining claims in the WSA but development is not projected in the foreseeable future and they are not expected to be a manageability problem.

The USAF has stated that military flights will continue in the vicinity of the WSA, whether it is designated or not. Overflights would detract from solitude and BLM management could not mitigate such disturbance. This conflict can be resolved only at the Congressional level.

There are 11 State-owned sections (6,661 acres) scattered throughout the WSA. Major developments on these sections and related access and activity would reduce the quality of wilderness values throughout the WSA. Information provided by mining companies in February 1991 indicate that about 44 percent of the WSA is now under mining claim and that four of the in-held State sections are leased for minerals. According to their data, which has been substantiated by the USGS and BLM geologists, there will be a need for exploration access and possibly development on BLM and State lands in the WSA. The primary developments would be for disseminated gold.

Energy and Mineral Resource Values

Because the WSA is not recommended for wilderness designation, the USGS and the U.S. Bureau of Mines (USBM) did not prepare a mineral assessment report for the area. A geochemical survey conducted by the USGS found high anomalies of several elements that include: gold, silver, mercury, barium, copper, lead, and zinc. Two USGS reports done in 1989 and 1990 produced from the geochemical survey stated the possibility of a larger volume of mineralized rock in the subsurface or in adjacent areas. The western part of the WSA has been targeted by private industry for gold and silver exploration. To date, eleven holes have been drilled inside the WSA and eight holes have been drilled on cherrystems and in-held state sections, delineating commercial grades of gold and silver. More drill holes are being proposed for

the immediate future. According to BLM geologists, other small deposits of beryllium, lead, zinc, tungsten, and uranium may exist within the WSA, but the degree of certainty is very low. This assumption is based on the geology of the WSA.

Industry evaluations of the potential for oil and gas resources within the WSA indicate high favorability for the occurrence of oil and gas deposits. Several exploratory holes have been drilled but no shows were reported. Because of fairly favorable geologic structure and permeability, it has been concluded that small pools of oil or gas may exist.

Impacts on Resources

The comparative impact table (Table 4) summarizes the effects on pertinent resources for alternatives including designation of the entire area as wilderness.

Local Social and Economic Considerations

Social and economic factors concerning this WSA were not considered to be significant issues in the EIS. Recent exploration for disseminated gold has contributed a few jobs to the Millard County area and future mining activities could contribute additional job and tax base.

Summary of WSA-Specific Public Comments

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. Comments received during the early stages of the EIS preparation were used to develop significant study issues and alternatives for the ultimate management of the WSA.

During formal public review of the Draft EIS, a total of 96 inputs specifically addressing this WSA were received from 113 commenters, including oral statements received at 17 public hearings on the EIS. Each letter or oral testimony was considered to be one input. Duplicate letters or oral statements by the same commenter were not counted as additional inputs or signatures. Each individual was credited with one signature or testimony regardless of the number of inputs.

KING TOP WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

In general, 87 commenters supported wilderness designation for part or all of the WSA, while 20 commenters were opposed. Six commenters addressed the relative merits of the EIS, but took no formal position on wilderness designation.

Those favoring wilderness commented on special features present in the WSA and the protection offered by wilderness designation. The majority of those commenting in favor of wilderness were from urban areas in Utah. Of particular concern was the need to protect special features, wildlife, and wildlife habitat.

Those opposing wilderness were concerned that wilderness would preclude mineral exploration and development; limit public access; and restrict weed, pest, and fire control. The majority of these commenters were from rural Utah, and were local to the area.

One Federal agency, the USAF, commented on the Draft EIS for this WSA. The USAF did not take a position regarding designation or nondesignation of the WSA but noted that low altitude flights will continue over the WSA with or without wilderness designation and that they will not negotiate nor sign any agreement to avoid the proposed wilderness area. This conflict can be resolved only on the Congressional level.

No comment letters were received on the Final EIS.

There are 11 State sections (6,661 acres) in the WSA. In commenting on the Draft EIS, the State of Utah expressed general opposition to wilderness designation but did not take a definite position regarding wilderness designation of the WSA. The State commented that the wilderness values for the King Top WSA are not considered high within the region and that some conflicts exist with livestock operations, minerals and energy resource potential and significant economic losses. The State recommended a 1,920-acre designation of Fossil Mountain as a historic site. Specific State comments on the Draft EIS dealt with inadequacies of the geology discussion, underrating of the favorability for min-

erals, and lack of information about the town of Ibex.

The Millard County Master Plan does not specifically address wilderness. The Millard County Commission favors protection of natural and esthetic resources on public lands as well as multiple use and believes that these objectives can be met without wilderness designation. The Commission has endorsed the Consolidated Local Government Response to Wilderness that opposes wilderness designation for BLM lands in Utah.

KING TOP WSA

Table 4
Comparative Summary of Impacts by Alternative

Issue Topics	Alternatives		
	Recommendation No Action/No Wilderness	All Wilderness (84,770 Acres)	Partial Wilderness (53,044 Acres)
Impacts on Wilderness Values	Wilderness values would not be protected by wilderness designation. In the foreseeable future, naturalness and opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation would be slightly reduced in quality on 5 acres of the WSA due to development of guzzlers from which animal special features would benefit. Vehicular use of 30 miles of ways would detract from opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation. Special features would not be significantly affected.	Wilderness values would be preserved. In the foreseeable future, naturalness and opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation would be slightly reduced in quality on 5 acres of the WSA due to development of guzzlers from which animal special features would benefit. Closing all ways to vehicular use would enhance opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation.	Wilderness values would be preserved in the designated area which is about 63 percent of the WSA. In the foreseeable future, naturalness and opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation would be slightly reduced in quality on 5 acres of the WSA due to development of guzzlers from which animal special features would benefit. Special features would be preserved. Continued vehicular use of 24 miles of ways in the non-designated area would detract from opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation.
Impacts on Livestock Management	Livestock grazing would not be adversely affected because management and access would continue as at present.	Wilderness designation would result in restrictions on access and inconvenience to livestock permittees. Management costs and sheep losses to predators would increase.	Access for livestock management would not be significantly affected because only 6 of the 30 miles of ways in the WSA would be in the designated area. Sheep losses to predators would increase slightly.
Impacts on Recreation	Overall, recreational use would increase. The quality of primitive recreation would be reduced as vehicular use of 30 miles of ways increases.	Primitive recreational use would be preserved and would increase. Vehicle-oriented recreation would be eliminated, but the area is not an ORV destination.	Overall, recreational use would increase. The quality of primitive recreation would be reduced in the benchlands of the WSA as vehicular use of 24 miles of ways increases in the nondesignated area.